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ABSTRACT

A number of professionals in the family life field have examined the changing American values toward the family and responsibility to aging parents. Research shows that the provision of social services to the aged have in many ways eased the traditional norms of family members responsibility toward aging parents. In response, the social service worker seems to be emerging as the essential caretaker in this country. This paper presents a concise overview of the literature on intergenerational relations and the dilemma it presents to professionals in gerontology, and describes the efforts of one New York State Continuing Education Program in providing short-term gerontological training to these social service providers. The paper outlines the major components and ideological dilemmas such training presents to a group that have had little formal training in working with the older client and what long-term benefits may be derived from such short-term training. (Author)

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AGING AND THE SURROGATE FAMILY: THE ROLE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION IN SERVICES TO THE AGED AND THEIR FAMILIES

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ABSTRACT

A number of professionals in the family life field have examined the changing American values toward the family and responsibility to aging parents. Research shows that the provision of social services to the aged have in many ways eased the traditional norms of family members responsibility toward aging parents. In response, the social service worker seems to be emerging as the essential caretaker in this country.

This paper presents a concise overview of the literature on intergenerational relations and the dilemma it presents to professionals in gerontology, and describes the efforts of one New York State Continuing Education Program in providing short-term gerontological training to these social service providers. The paper outlines the major components, and idealogical dilemmas, such training presents to a group that have had little formal training in working with the older client and what long-term benefits may be derived from such short-term training.

AGING AND THE SURROGATE FAMILY: THE ROLE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION IN SERVICES TO THE AGED AND THEIR FAMILIES

The purpose of this paper is twofold: First, to present a concise overview of the literature in intergenerational relations and the dilemma it presents to professionals working in the field and two, to describe how the need for professional training in gerontological knowledge are tackled by one Continuing Education program in New York State and what benefits such training may have for the future. It is not the intention of this paper to single out one program as any better or worse at providing professional training. This Continuing Education Project is unique, however, in its gerontological skills because of its varied training population across the State which is geographically and philosphically fragmented by misconceptions and myths about aging and working with the aged. The Program attempts to provide training to a group that have had little formal training in working with the older client.

OVERVIEW

A number of professionals in the family life field have examined the changing American values toward the family and responsibility to aging parents. Talcott Parsons has written, "The family can be seen to have two primary functions, not one. On the one hand it is the primary agent of socialization for the child, while on the other it is the primary basis of security for the normal adult"(3)

(3)Parsons, T. The normal American family. In S. Farber, P. Mustacchi, and R. H. Wilson (eds.), Man and civilization. New York; 1965.

Irving Rosow reports that, "Relations to children are by far the most emotionally charged area of our life, one fraught with anxiety, subject to distraction and denial, about which the respondents constantly try to reassure themselves...the distinction between formal responsibility for old parents and the emotional tie between generations is curcial.[4] The current research is oftentimes contradictory; some proposing closer filial relationships in old age, and others describe the situation of child-parent responsibility as one of hopeless neglect and abuse.[5] As such, the study of intergenerational relations warrants much more intensive attention than it has been accorded in existing studies of the family. However, it is clear that family members in American society are often under cross-pressures. They may wish to assist their older family members in keeping with traditional family norms and expectations, however, for a number of reasons they are unable to provide perhaps at best a little more than affection to their aging parents.

The provision of social services to the aged have in many ways eased the traditional norms of family members responsibility toward aging parents, and as Shanas and Sussman (1977) have noted, "The current literature shows that in almost every country more and more services to older people are now provided by a family surrogate rather than by family members." In response, the social service worker seems to be emerging as the essential caretaker in this

[4] Rosow, I. Social integration of the aged. New York; Free Press, 1967, p. 25.

[5] The studies of B. Simos, (1970) E. W. Burgess (1960) and J. Kaplan (1975) are cited in making this statement.

country, and accordingly Shanas and Sussman (1977) state that specifically the social worker find themselves both "pushed" and "pulled" into the field of aging services. They are "pushed" because of the increasing number of aged persons needing assistance, and the seeming inability of the nuclear family to provide these services, and "pulled" because in taking over the problem of aging services the profession has carved out a new functional area for itself.

However, the provision of services by professionals to the elderly person is a unique kind of professional relationship, as unique as children's services and family services, and the need for formalized training in the area seems imperative. The Gerontological Society, the professional society for those working in the field of aging, has devoted much publication space to articles by noted gerontologists to the concept of professional training, education and the delivery of services to elderly persons.

The debate seemingly continues between the "ivory tower" and "the real world." Institutions of higher education have a tradition of being the producers of knowledge. However, the application of the facts to the general public has not usually characterized knowledge-producing universities. To this end the community and junior colleges, private organizations and the mass media have often taken over the dissemination of those facts to the larger community. Links between knowledge production, dissemination of facts, utilization of the information and research evaluation of this total process must be established and continued (Hickey, 1974). Short-term training not only presents challenges, but also provides the link to production, dissemination, and utilization of knowledge for the professional.

In response to the need seen by the State Department of Social Services for specialized training to its service providers...the School of Social Wel-

fare, a professional school for the education of social workers, at the State University of New York in Albany is currently engaged in a three year federally funded training program directed to this concept of short-term training to the professional.

THE CONTINUING EDUCATION MODEL

Title XX of the Social Security Act is a new law, signed by President Ford on January 4, 1975, pertaining to the social services program by State and local departments of Social Services. The Continuing Education Project at SUNYA seeks to accomplish several goals as identified in Title XX of the Social Security Act. These include training currently employed staff of county social services departments to prevent and remedy cases of neglect or child abuse; to provide effective protective services for adults needing such services; to provide training in planning and needs assessment for staff of county departments of social services; and to provide management training for state staff (N.Y.) responsible for working with county departments toward the implementation of the goals of Title XX. Although geared toward the professional providing social services in New York State the programs developed are adaptable to any state's needs and goals. A seemingly overambitious task, the Continuing Education Project enters its third year with a potential 3,350 social service employees receiving training.

Each program area; Needs assessment and planning, children's and family services, management and staff development and adult services, develop instructional strategies appropriate to their objective and trainee capability. The Adult Services program focuses on providing information and learning experiences to support a fuller understanding of the provision of social and legal protective services for adults. Specifically the Adult Services Program uses a

variety of instructional formats in the presentation of the training. These include lecture and discussion, workshops, films and videotapes, case studies, role-playing exercises, and simulation games.

The Adult Services program provided training to a total of 681 trainees from 56 Social Service districts in basic direct service, advanced direct service, a supervision program, protective services for adults and training was also provided for infirmary staff. Much of the content of this particular program focused on the institutionalized elderly, both alternatives to and providing services within.

The content area for the other programs vary accordingly, but all focus on the sensitization of casework staff to the aging process and the various problems associated with it, with the emphasis on knowledge and attitudinal training. Specific content includes: Processes of Aging, Community Organization Skills, Problems of Aging, Legal Protective Services, Management of Grief, Caseload Management, Adult Foster Care, Life Space, Use of Volunteers to name just a few of the workshop components.

The development and execution of training programs comprise the major focus of short-term training. However, long-range objectives are attended to by evaluative measures. It is the intention of training that the participant observes, learns, integrates and utilizes new skills and information in their job, and continues to reflect back on the training experience as a learning, as well as an enjoyable experience.

As such, the demand for accountability is a prominent theme for anyone dealing with programs for public consumption. According to Suchman (1967), "All social institutions are required to provide 'proof' of their legitimacy and effectiveness in order to justify society's continued support". Those of

us who operate such publicly funded training programs are well acquainted with such a request.

The majority of trainees in Adult Services had a college degree with most having majored in the social sciences or liberal arts. Nearly 60% of the participants had been in their speciality area (Family Services) less than three years; and 68% being in their unit three years or less. Overwhelmingly the evaluations show the programs were received enthusiastically with most of the participants objectives for the program being met. More than 75% of the participants from all the programs would recommend the training to others, and most (85%) hoped to return to training again.

In conclusion, the "effectiveness" of such training is a difficult item to measure but if our measures "beyond the smiles test" are indicative of the program's value to the participants than the comment that many had made that, "This training was the best they had ever attended", indeed shows substantial value in training and need for continued professional growth in training programs.

CONCLUSIONS

As already mentioned, training, such as this, has short-term and long-term benefits. The effective use of training by employees should not only provide the participant with additional information but new skills to bring to their roles at work, and with continued integration of new skills, new attitudes toward the aging, the aged and the provision of social services to this group will develop. Additionally, professionals will continue to understand their own aging process and the familial cross-pressures it often brings. Perhaps they will better understand the conflict spoken of between the generations more effectively and be able to work with these families in under-

standing the changes of age.

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